

Urban Planning and Design Competitions

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How can the public and private sector efficiently and economically obtain innovative, high-quality, multi-disciplinary plans and designs for large-scale projects?

An approach that offers multiple benefits is the design competition. “Design competitions deliver exciting buildings and projects. They drive up quality, stimulate creativity and innovation and generate a range of ideas improving choice. They are a highly successful procurement model that brings out the best in a project – often providing a platform to showcase new and emerging talent.” [Brady, 2013]

Design competitions permit a freedom of creativity that usual project formats don't allow, which brings significant innovations and most of the new trends in urban planning, design and architecture. In some ways, competitions are essential to imagine new solutions to improve our environment because they don't limit the creativity and opportunities to think differently.

Design competitions date back over two millennia and include a war memorial for the Acropolis in 448 BCE. Numerous famous historic and current projects are also the result of design competitions including the White House; the Eiffel Tower; the 9/11 Memorial; and Park Russia, the largest theme park in Europe. Design competitions are ideal for large-scale, highly visible projects which have sufficient time and budget to conduct the competition program.

There are many advantages to the competition method for the sponsor. A properly run design

competition is a good way to:

- Generate a wide range of new ideas in the approach to a design
- Enhance the credibility of the sponsor
- Uncover new talent who might not ordinarily be approached in the traditional process
- Attract the attention of the press and the general public to the needs being addressed
- Broaden public discourse about design, as well as about the specific project
- Increase exposure for the sponsor (AIA, 2010)

These projects also offer the competitors an opportunity to win prizes/contracts, develop public relationships, engage in project research and design, attract media attention and acquire further contracts. These opportunities collectively may be much more valuable than being awarded a contract via the traditional bidding process.

Numerous professional organizations have prepared guidelines for competitions including the American Institute of Architects, Royal Institute of British Architects and the International Union of Architects. These and many other similar programs typically address the

following design competition components:

Sponsor, Agencies/Firms & Stakeholders

Organizations sponsoring the program and the beneficiaries of the design recommendations and proposals should be clearly identified and engaged in the process.

Professional Adviser, Advisory Team & Professional Organizations

The design competition should have an adviser and/or advisory team responsible for organizing and managing the event. Ideally this process is guided or coordinated by one or more professional organizations.

Designers, Design Teams & Students

The event should clearly identify who may submit entries. The competition may be open to everyone or restricted to specific firms, institutions or geographic areas.

Jury

An independent jury of design professionals and/or stakeholders should be formed to ensure an equitable selection process.

Program, Procedures & Conditions

The design competition may take a variety of forms (open or limited; project or ideas; one-stage or multi-stage, anonymous or cooperative) and the appropriate model applied. The program must be transparent, accountable, participatory and equitable. A jury report must be prepared that demonstrates these qualities.

Dialogue

The extensive experience of participants in urban planning and design competitions can be used. The organizers may consider starting and maintaining a dialogue with the participants to improve the program, procedures and conditions.

Submission Requirements

A guide to submission requirements must be available to all participants. This would include the types and formats of materials such as reports, multi-media, models, etc.

Rules, Ownership & Litigation

The rules of the competition must be available to all participants. These include ownership of submission materials and litigation proceedings in the event of a disagreement.

Schedule

The design competition schedule must be available to the public and include the following dates:

- a. Preliminary discussion & formulation
- b. Competition planning
- c. Competition initiation
- d. Competition operation
- e. Receipt of entries
- f. Jury operation
- g. Announcement of winner
- h. Follow through

Prizes, Compensation & Honoraria

Design competitions must specify the award categories and association prizes. For many design competitions, invited design firms are compensated for their initial work. Honoraria should also be considered for specific participants based on established criteria. The winner of the competition may or may not be selected for a contract or future work. It should be noted, that many firms spend more on the competition than will be compensated by the prize money.

Event, Exhibition & Publicity

The design competition should include a variety of public events such as open houses, design charrettes, award ceremonies, and others. The media should also be invited to provide press coverage, and this effort should be assisted with media kits.

In the search for design excellence, competitions offer a unique approach that elevates design quality along with many other public and private sector benefits. Many of the world's

most iconic places are the result of design competition: from the Acropolis to the Eiffel Tower; from UK Houses of Parliament to the US White House; from ancient monuments to hundreds of contemporary works of architecture, art, landscape architecture, planning and urban design. The design competition is an extraordinary place-making tool.

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